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WEISER RIVER BASIN (IDAHO) PRELIMINARY
ECONOMIC RECONNAISSANCE AND ESTIMATE
OF GROWTH, 1960-2010

U. S. Department of Health, Education and
Welfare
Portland, Oregon

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COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN PROJECT
For Water Supply and Water Quality Management

WEISER RIVER BASIN (IDAHO)
PRELIMINARY ECONOMIC RECONNAISSANCE
AND ESTIMATE OF GROWTH, 1960-2010

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
<u>Purpose of This Analysis</u>	1
<u>Definition of the Area</u>	1
<u>Study Period</u>	1
<u>Limitations of This Analysis</u>	1
PRESENT ECONOMIC BASE	2
<u>Population</u>	2
<u>Industry</u>	3
ESTIMATED FUTURE GROWTH	8
<u>Factors Influencing Future Growth</u>	8
<u>Future Population</u>	10

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October, 1962

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of This Analysis

This analysis is intended to provide a preliminary estimate of the economic potentials and anticipated growth of the subject area.

Definition of the Area

The Weiser River Basin, for the purposes of this study, is defined to include those portions of eastern Washington and southern Adams Counties that compose the following census districts in the Census of Population of 1950: West Weiser, Weiser, Middle Weiser, East Weiser, Mann Creek, Midvale, Cambridge, Goodrich, Council.

Study Period

The study period is the 50-year period 1960-2010, with an interim point at 1985.

Limitations of This Analysis

Two limitations apply to this study. The first is that it is intended only as a preliminary estimate of the outlook for the subject area's growth. Subsequently, in connection with the Columbia River Basin Project for Water Supply and Water Quality Management, an analysis will be made on an industry-by-industry basis of the growth potential in the various sub-basins. At that time, this preliminary estimate will be reviewed, and revised if necessary.

The second limitation is that this study is intended for use particularly in assessing future water needs. Emphasis has been placed on the analysis of those industries which make heavy demands upon the water resource. Other industries have been considered only insofar as they may have a significant effect on future population. For this reason, this study is not submitted as a detailed industrial forecast.

PRESENT ECONOMIC BASE

Population

The Weiser River Basin contains about 75 per cent of the population of Washington and Adams Counties, and about 14½ per cent of the population of the eight-county Central Snake area outside of Ada and Canyon Counties. Population is concentrated in four towns - Weiser, Midvale and Cambridge in Washington County, and Council in Adams County. Moderate growth of these towns has kept the area's population nearly static over the last two decades, in spite of considerable contraction of rural population. Table I indicates the distribution and trend of population in the area.

Table I ^{1/}

POPULATION TRENDS IN THE WEISER RIVER BASIN

<u>Area</u>	<u>Population</u>			<u>Change</u>
	1940	1950	1960	1940-1960
Weiser	3,664	3,961	4,208	+14.6%
Midvale	262	231	285	+ 8.8%
Cambridge	405	354	441	+ 8.9%
Council	692	748	827	+19.5%
Total Urban Population	5,023	5,294	5,761	+14.7%
Rural Population ^{2/}	3,831	3,461	3,175	-17.0%
Total Population	8,854	8,755	8,936	+ .9%

^{1/} U. S. Census of Population 1950, 1960

^{2/} Rural populations for 1940 and 1950 represent the populations of the nine census districts, less the populations of the four townships. For 1960 the figure is derived by subtracting town populations and a portion of the Washington and Adams Counties' 1950-1960 population loss similar to the region's 1940 to 1950 population loss.

The course of population in the Weiser Basin is typical of the larger Central Snake River Basin. The whole area has seen rural populations drop while town populations have risen modestly. The fact that the Central Snake area has kept pace with Idaho's population growth is due largely to the population influx in Elmore County as a result of emplacement of Mountain Home Air Force Base and a related missile site. Table II summarizes population trends in the Central Snake Basin.

Table II ^{3/}

POPULATION TRENDS IN THE CENTRAL SNAKE RIVER BASIN

<u>Area</u>	<u>Population</u>			<u>Change</u>
	1940	1950	1960	1940-1960
Adams County	3,407	3,347	2,978	-12.6%
Washington County	8,853	8,576	8,378	- 5.4%
Boise County	2,333	1,776	1,646	-29.5%
Elmore County	5,518	6,687	16,719	+203%
Gem County	9,544	8,730	9,127	- 4.3%
Owyhee County	5,652	6,307	6,375	+12.8%
Payette County	9,511	11,921	12,363	+30.0%
Valley County	4,035	4,270	3,663	-10.1%
Central Snake Area	48,853	51,614	61,249	+25.4%
Idaho	524,873	588,637	667,191	+27.1%

^{3/} U. S. Census of Population, 1950, 1960

Industry

The Weiser River Basin is a predominantly agricultural area. In the portion of the area that reaches into Adams County lumbering is pursued, with a sawmill located in Council and logging carried out in Payette National Forest. Agriculture, however, provided 31.3% of the total employment in 1960, and may be presumed to be the principal source of support for service industries.

Changing agricultural patterns have imposed shifts on the regional economy. Increasing concentration of farm ownership, together with an increase in farmland and greater attention to the grazing of cattle and sheep has, assisted by the use of irrigation, resulted in a sharp rise in productivity. Between 1954 and 1959 the value of agricultural products sold in Washington County rose 42.2 per cent; yet between 1950 and 1960 farm employment fell 24.6 per cent in the two-county area. The agricultural change has been two-sided. On the one hand there has been far more attention to grazing and sale of cattle and sheep. On the other, added irrigation opportunities have resulted in more diversified cropping: production of oats, field seeds, potatoes, sugar beets, and vegetables -- largely corn and dry onions -- has increased; while production of wheat, barley, dairy products and poultry products has dropped off. Wheat remains the chief crop of the area, but sugar beets and potatoes have climbed close in terms of value of crops sold. Major changes in the agricultural economy of the region are summarized in Table III.

Table III ^{1/}

TRENDS IN WASHINGTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE, 1954 - 1959

	<u>1954</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>Change</u>
Number of farms	776	678	-12.6%
Land in farms (acres)	566,729	659,270	16.2%
Average size of farm (acres)	730.3	972.4	33.2%
Land in irrigated farms (acres)	394,213	487,916	24.8%
Cropland harvested (acres)	73,766	66,230	-10.2%
Value of crops sold	\$2,351,951	\$2,903,200	23.4%
Pasture (acres)	462,673	560,645	21.2%
Irrigated pasture (acres)	13,385	23,228	73.5%
Value of livestock & products sold	\$3,469,641	\$5,364,927	53.6%

^{1/} U. S. Census of Agriculture, 1959

The town of Weiser, county seat of Washington County, is the largest of the four towns in the area, and provides a major share of manufacturing and service employment, as indicated in Table IV.

Table IV 2/

PROPORTION OF 1960 WASHINGTON COUNTY EMPLOYMENT IN SELECTED CATEGORIES
PROVIDED BY WEISER

Finance, insurance, real estate	83%
Personal service	70.2%
Public administration	67%
Wholesale & retail trade	66.8%
Manufacturing	64.5%
Professional & related service	61%
All employment	51.1%

2/ U. S. Census of Population, 1960

Weiser has not developed a substantial manufacturing or processing industry. Most manufacturing units are small, and their products are largely consumed or employed in the immediate area. Food processing is the chief manufacturing industry, with a flour mill, a bakery, a beverage bottling plant, and a producer of potato chips located in the town. Most of the region's agricultural output, however, is routed to processing plants in nearby Payette and Emmett.

Commercial and service occupations are the major source of employment opportunities. Besides the legal and administrative services provided by county government, the town contains a stockyard, and a grain warehouse. Two bus lines and the Union Pacific Railroad serve it. Weiser contains, besides retail establishments, eleven wholesale firms, a branch of the Idaho First National Bank, Washington County's only hospital, utility offices, and grade and high schools.

Cambridge and Midvale, located 31 and 23 highway miles, respectively, up-river from Weiser, are largely service centers for the agricultural countryside. Each contains a grain warehouse on a spur of the Union Pacific, a grade school, a high school, and retail establishments. A glue factory in Cambridge employed 16 persons in 1960.

Council, the county seat and largest community in Adams County, is somewhat larger than Cambridge or Midvale. It serves as both an agricultural service center and as the focus of regional lumbering, being the location of a saw-mill of Boise Cascade Corporation and three logging firms. In addition to the services provided by its smaller neighbors, Council contains a stock-yard, a hospital, and a branch bank.

Table V, which lists employment provided by various industries, reflects the weight of agriculture on the region's economy.

Table V 3/

NUMBER OF PERSONS EMPLOYED IN VARIOUS INDUSTRY GROUPS, 1960

<u>Industry</u>	<u>Adams County</u>		<u>Washington County</u>	
	number	%labor force	number	%labor force
Agriculture	302	25.8%	1,019	30.8%
Forestry & fisheries	29	2.5	4	.1
Construction	63	5.4	176	5.3
Manufacturing	155	13.3	320	9.7
Transportation, communication, utility	26	2.2	188	5.7
Wholesale & retail trade	178	15.3	573	17.4
Finance, insurance, real estate	20	1.7	47	1.4
Business & repair service	8	.7	66	2.0
Personal service	61	5.2	175	5.3
Hospital & medical service	32	2.7	51	1.5
Education	38	3.2	214	6.5
Other professional service	39	3.3	92	2.8
Public administration	39	3.3	118	3.6
Industry not classified	8	.7	92	2.8
Total Employed	998	85.6	3,135	95.1
Unemployed	168	14.4	164	4.9
Total Labor Force	1,166	100.0	3,299	100.0

3/ U. S. Census of Population, 1960

Employment in the Weiser Basin has changed materially over the last decade. Agricultural employment has fallen off sharply, as previously noted, and this has been aggravated by an even steeper drop in forest products employment. These have been only partially compensated by increased service employment and some development of manufacturing. Although increased activity in food processing, a second print shop in Weiser, moderate expansion of mercury production in Weiser, establishment of a producer of trailers in Weiser, and a glue factory in Cambridge, have added employment opportunities, the decline in the region's two basic industries has resulted in loss of population, some contraction in retailing in both counties, as well as heavy unemployment in Adams County.

Major shifts in employment in Washington and Adams Counties are summarized in Table VI. (It should be noted that 1960 was a particularly bad year in the cyclical lumbering industry, and that employment opportunities in forest products industries may be somewhat less unfavorable than the figures indicate.)

Table VI ^{4/}

SIGNIFICANT SHIFTS IN EMPLOYMENT, 1950 - 1960

<u>Industry</u>	<u>Employment</u>		<u>Change</u>
	1950	1960	
Washington County			
Agriculture	1,332	1,019	-313 (22.6%)
Manufacturing:			
forest products	66	36	- 30 (45.5%)
primary metals	6	17	+ 11 (183%)
transportation equipment	0	9	+ 9
food & kindred products	65	166	+101 (155%)
printing & publishing	19	38	+ 19 (100%)
chemical & allied	0	16	+ 16
Business & repair service	98	66	- 32 (32.7%)
Education	114	214	+100 (87.7%)
Total			-121

^{4/} U. S. Census of Population, 1960

Table VI (Continued)

C-8

Industry

Adams County

Agriculture	425	302	-123 (29%)
Manufacturing: forest products	239	151	- 88 (37.8%)
Construction	33	63	+ 30 (91%)
Transportation	32	8	- 24 (75%)
Eating & drinking places	30	46	+ 16 (53.3%)
Finance, insurance, real estate	5	20	+ 15 (300%)
Business & repair service	45	28	- 17 (37.8%)
Education	50	38	- 12 (24%)
Total			-203

ESTIMATED FUTURE GROWTH

Factors Influencing Future Growth

Relying largely on agriculture for its economic livelihood, the Weiser Basin's future development must be related to the evolution of agriculture in the Central Snake River area.

Development of a substantial manufacturing industry seems most unlikely. The area is not favorably oriented to major markets for heavy manufacturing industries. The presently known mineral resources present little prospect of intensive exploitation. The absence of educational and cultural resources generally associated with industries employing advanced technology precludes likelihood of establishment of science-based industries.

Increased irrigated agriculture holds the opportunity of off-setting the recent trend of decreasing rural population. An addition to irrigation is included in the proposed Weiser Project involving, approximately, the stretch of the Weiser River from Cambridge to Weiser. Additional and/or alternate

irrigation opportunities are also under consideration. Preliminary estimates by the Bureau of Reclamation indicate that the long range effect of such projects will be to stabilize the rural population at about the present level. It is likely that food-processing activities in the town of Weiser may experience moderate expansion in the future as a side-effect of irrigation developments. Further irrigation will presumably be followed by expanded and diversified farm output. It is anticipated, however, that existing units elsewhere will be able to process most of the additional output.

Lumbering may be expected to provide another source of growth in the northern part of the area. While a relatively minor part of the western lumber industry, the area's timber resources are substantial, and should receive considerable exploitation with exhaustion of expansion possibilities of supply in more advanced lumbering areas. In the more distant part of the study period, as opportunities for agricultural expansion decline and lumber demand rises, lumbering, and ancillary fabrication of forest products, could become a relatively greater portion of the regional economy.

A fourth possible source of growth - largely in the northern part of the region - is expanded recreational use of the Payette National Forest and nearby lakes and reservoirs. Distance from population centers, however, limits the impact of recreational opportunities.

The most likely course of development, then, would see a leveling off of farm employment, perhaps even a minor rise to 1985, as a result of increased irrigation. Service industries and service employment may be seen to expand

moderately as farm employment stabilizes and farm incomes rise. Food processing would appear to be the only likely source of more than the most modest growth of manufacturing to 1985. From 1985 to 2010, however, lumbering may play an increasingly important role in the area. Throughout the period, recreation may be expected to exert a slight but beneficial effect on service industries and employment.

Future Population

Neither the recent history of the area nor the design pattern of economic development outlined above suggests vigorous population expansion during the study period.

The forecast of population is based on several assumptions suggested by consideration of the evolving economic base: (1) Rural population may be expected to stabilize, largely as a result of irrigation. (2) Town population may be expected to continue to grow as a function of the State's over-all population growth, the broad tendency to urbanization, and the growth in the ratio of service employment to "goods" industry employment. The rate of growth of town populations is estimated at 1 per cent, compared to .7 per cent in the period 1940 - 1960. (3) The study area's economic base will continue to be mainly based on agriculture; and growth based on agriculture may be anticipated to be less than that of the State as a whole.

Based on these assumptions, the forecast of future population for design purposes is shown in Table VII. (The indicated rate of population growth for the area is .7 per cent a year, or about half that projected for the State as a whole. ^{1/})

^{1/} Based on estimates for 1980 and 2000 in Kerr Committee Report No. 5, Page 29, Series II, Migration Assumption No. 1.

Table VII

ESTIMATED POPULATION IN THE WEISER RIVER BASIN

	1960	1985	2010
Rural population	3,175	3,175	3,175
Urban population	5,761	7,475	9,500
Total	8,936	10,650	12,675

It is estimated that the major part of the population enlargement will occur in Weiser and Council, with Council growing at a somewhat faster rate, particularly in the later stages of the study period.

It must be recognized that this projection is for design purposes only, and that in a region so small and sparsely settled very minor economic changes would be sufficient to upset it. For example, establishment of a moderate sized factory in the area would create conditions for expansion of greater magnitude. Conversely, failure of new irrigation opportunities might be presumed to result in slower growth, or even decline.